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ABSTRACT

Singapore primary and secondary school teachers (n=76) attending an inservice education course on motivating learners identified and described two critical lessons: one in which the teachers successfully motivated students and another in which they failed to motivate pupils. Participants recalled those critical lessons in a reflective and self-evaluative manner. Each lesson was analyzed by an assigned "critic" and discussed by the group. Analysis of the lessons revealed that primary school teachers felt that "pupil involvement" and "tuning in" were most frequently successful in motivating pupils to learn. Among secondary school teachers, "teacher being prepared," "topic relevance," and "teacher concern/awareness of needs" were contributing factors. At the primary level, commonly cited reasons for motivation failure were "teacher doing the usual" and "no tuning in." At the secondary level, the most frequently reported cause was "teacher being unprepared." Being able to motivate learning was felt to result from "knowledge of, concern, and love for children"; "teacher attributes"; "effort and preparation"; "lively lessons"; and "teacher awareness of learning needs." (JDD)

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LEARNING FROM ONE ANOTHER: MOTIVATING AND DEMOTIVATING LEARNERS IN THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

It is a great concern for teachers to involve students in the learning process. The reason is simple: if students do not learn, teachers cannot claim that they teach. If students are not motivated to learn, teaching can hardly be conducted.

Motivate students to learn is a competence which teachers can acquire over time. Theories on motivation provide the guide while the practice of it comes with experience. However, experience does not happen over night. If teachers can share their experiences and learn from one another, teaching experience will be widened and competence can be achieved in a shorter period of time.

To enable learning from teaching experiences, 76 teachers recalled two lessons: one in which they thought they had motivated their students to learn, and the other, a lesson in which they thought they failed in motivating their students. Responses were varied. Lessons on different subjects were related describing what actually had gone on in the lesson--the teaching behaviours and students' involvement. Findings are realistic and interesting and they will be discussed at the presentation.

Keywords: Motivation
Critical Incidents (Lessons)
Peer Learning

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Introduction

No one will deny that our pupils come from a great variety of background. Besides their own gender, age, ability, aptitude, religion, ethnicity and language, their parents' educational level and background can also make teaching a far-from-easy profession. Similarly, teachers also come in all sizes, shapes, colours, etc., an evidence of diversity. Teacher educators, in particular, need to always bear in mind that they have to meet the challenges of diversity of diversity.

When teaching theories and principles are concerned--the knowledge base of teaching--every teacher would receive a similar dosage. But when it comes to the application or the practice of the theories and principles of teaching, teachers are frequently reminded that there is pupil variation.

I am often confronted with questions like: "How to motiva e him, he is so lazy?!" or "He cannot be motivated. He comes from a broken home!?" Honestly, I do not have a quick answer for them. And even if I had, my answer will not help them become better teachers in later days, because not all motivation problem can be solved the same way.

Teachers who reflect and self-evaluate often enough will improve and gain competence more than those who are complacent about their teaching and simply blame others for anything that goes wrong in the classroom. Competence in teaching comes with experience. We are more competent as we become experienced in teaching. Experience, however, varies with time. As teachers, we are often impatient to become experienced, yet we want to know more and be competent. So, other than reading further, teachers also come to courses to learn more, not conscious of the fact that they can also learn from one another.

Methodology & Rationale

To help teachers examine their teaching adequacies and inadequacies, I distributed to each of them a questionnaire the first day of the course. They were to identify and write down anonymously two critical lessons: one when they could successfully motivate and another failed to motivate their pupils to learn. Responses were randomly distributed in the subsequent session for discussion. Each participant took turns to analyse and comment on a lesson while others listened. The rest of the participants could add on, agree or disagree and give their views.

These critical lessons differ from year to year, programme to programme, school (class) from school (class), written by teachers who come from different background and teach pupils of all types. These critical lessons are from the current course participants so that they are directly relevant and appropriate for group discussion, analysis and comments.

When teacher participants recall and put on paper those critical lessons, they are in fact evaluating their own teaching. They need to be reflective and objective in analysing their own practice, as they make a contrast between their success with their failure in motivating their pupils to learn.

During discussion, I asked participants to study the actions taken before and during lesson, and point out the strength and weakness that led to a success or a failure to motivate the pupils to learn. The 'critic' of each response explained why the lesson reported could or could not motivate pupils. While explaining that to fellow-participants, the 'critic' had to apply educational principles and theories to justify one's view.

When reporting their opinion and comments on the critical lessons, participants hear one another out. In that

way, they learn from each other in a most unthreatening manner. They are at the same time exposed to other people's encounters and difficulties or frustrations for that matter, in motivating pupils to learn in the classroom. Such learning from one another, using critical lessons, has been found to be useful, practical and enjoyable by course participants.

Subjects

Seventy-six experienced male and female teachers attended the in-service course on "Motivating Learners in the Classroom" conducted in 1993 and 1994. They were from the primary as well as the secondary schools, teaching a variety of subjects. Most of them volunteered to come, others were nominated by their schools.

3 Jan - 4 Mar 1993 N=21, 18 (Primary)--two groups
3 July - 4 Sep 1993 N=25/30 (Secondary)
9 July - 3 Sep 1994 N=12/13 (Primary)

Findings & Discussion

In analysing the data, gender, age, subject specialisation, classes taught, etc., were excluded. But when sample increases as I collect more responses, these variables could be looked into.

Motivation Factors

All the teachers except three (from the secondary group) responded to the item on their success in motivation. These same three teachers did not respond to the second item of the questionnaire asking them to recall a lesson in which they failed to motivate their learners. This suggests that all the primary school teachers were able to motivate their pupils to learn at least once.

Each of the two levels of teachers gave 10 reasons for their success. However, there is a difference (see Table 1) between the secondary school teachers and primary school

Table 1: Frequencies (%) of Reasons for Success in Motivating Learners

	Reasons	Primary	Secondary	Total
Preparation				
1	Teacher	2 (4)	4 (16)	6 (8)
2	Pupils	3 (6)	1 (4)	4 (5)
Setting the mood/Tuning-in				
3	Begin with a song, rhyme, joke or chit chat	11 (22)	1 (4)	12 (16)
Pupil involvement				
4	Activities/ experience/feeling manipulatives	15 (29)	2 (8)	17 (22)
Teaching				
5	Game-like learning	4 (8)	0 (0)	4 (5)
6	Variety of teaching methods	4 (8)	2 (8)	6 (8)
7	Incentive/reward	5 (10)	1 (4)	6 (8)
8	Challenge/Trust/ Confidence (Pep Talk)	4 (8)	0 (0)	4 (5)
9	Topic, examples, & tasks are related to real life	0 (0)	4 (16)	4 (5)
Teacher				
10	Teacher Shares views, experiences	1 (2)	1 (1)	2 (3)
11	Teacher concern & awareness	1 (2)	4 (16)	5 (7)
12	Teacher being busi-nesslike	0 (0)	2 (8)	2 (3)
Others	No response	0 (0)	3 (12)	3 (4)

teachers. The primary school teachers recalled "pupil involvement" and "tuning-in" most frequently (more than 20%) as reasons for the success in motivating their pupils to learn. While among the secondary school teachers, "teacher being prepared", "topic relevance," and "teacher concern/awareness of needs" were given as the contributing factors. Each of these was mentioned by more than 15% of the secondary school teachers. Expectedly, four primary school teachers attributed their success to the "game-like learning" and the "challenge (pep talk)" they offered while none of the secondary school teachers reported that. On the other hand, no primary school teacher related "teacher being business-like" and "topic relevance" as contributing factor to their success.

Demotivation Factors

Eleven teachers (14%), five from primary schools and six from the secondary schools, were unable to recall a lesson in which they failed to motivate pupils to learn (see Table 2). This supports earlier observation that teachers generally are able to motivate their learners.

Ten reasons were related as the causes of teachers' failure by the primary school teachers and the most commonly cited are "teacher doing the usual" and "no tuning-in." These suggest that teachers violating the principle of variety and pupil readiness will fail to motivate their learners in the classroom.

Again, secondary school teachers differ from primary school teachers in their responses. The secondary school teachers mentioned seven reasons, instead of ten, for their failure. The most frequently reported cause (16%) is "teacher being unprepared." This tallies with the response found earlier that "teacher preparedness" which is reported (16%) as one of the important causes of success in motivating learners.

Table 2: Frequencies (%) of Reasons for Failure in Motivating Learners

	Reasons	Primary	Secondary	Total
Planning				
1	Teacher is unprepared (due to personal reason)	3 (9)	4 (16)	7 (9)
2	Unable to get material and teaching aids	3 (9)	0 (0)	3 (4)
Lesson Development				
3	Teacher is doing the usual	17 (33)	3 (12)	20 (26)
4	Monotony: teaches the text, systematically	3 (9)	0 (0)	3 (4)
5	No tuning in, goes straight to the lesson (pupils are not ready)	7 (14)	0 (0)	7 (9)
6	There is no pupil involvement--teacher talk most of the time	4 (8)	3 (12)	7 (9)
Preconceived of Pupils' Misbehaviours (Biases)				
7	Start scolding and warning before teaching	4 (8)	3 (12)	7 (9)
Teacher Motivation				
8	Recognition/Happiness	1 (2)	1 (4)	2 (3)
Timing/Time				
9	End of the day/ insufficient time	1 (2)	2 (8)	3 (4)
Content				
10	Task/material--too difficult, uninteresting	3 (6)	1 (4)	4 (5)
No response		5 (10)	6 (24)	11 (14)

Teacher Needs for Being Able to Motivate Learning

On this item of the questionnaire, every teacher participant had something to say. Altogether there are 13 needs suggested. Table 3 shows the distribution and frequencies of responses. Again responses of the secondary school teachers differ from the responses of the primary school teachers.

More than 55% of the primary school teachers think that "knowledge of, concern and love for children" followed by "teacher attributes," "effort and preparation" and "lively lessons" are needs of teachers in order to motivate learning. On the other hand, almost 40% of the secondary school teachers think that "teacher attributes" followed by "teacher awareness of learning needs" and "lively lessons" are necessary.

Since these findings are from a diverse group of teachers, their experiences and suggestions may be helpful to the beginning teachers and the less effective teachers in their motivating learners in the classroom. If we can observe and use these as references, the challenge of diversity in the classroom is half met.

Implications & Conclusion

Teachers come from all over, a diversified pool of educators teaching our pupils of different disposition, race, age, gender, culture, ethnicity, religion, etc. Although most of them can manage teaching pretty well, it is important for them to upgrade themselves, update their knowledge and uplift their spirit. To learn from one another and share their experiences at least once or twice a year will refresh their responsibilities as motivators in the classroom.

Teachers often work in isolation with minimum supervision and without contact with colleagues, who could promote the sharing of ideas. To improve teaching competence, teachers should be given time to meet and discuss, to share and present their problems with one another. According to Neubert and

Table 3: Teachers' Needs for Motivating Learners to Learn

Needs	Primary	Secondary	Total
* Teacher motivation/ happiness	5 (4.5)	1 (2)	6 (3.5)
* Teacher attributes (positive attitude, patience, understanding)	15 (13.5)	8 (15)	23 (14)
* Teacher awareness to students' learning needs	5 (4.5)	7 (13)	12 (7)
* Learning and taking courses	1 (1)	2 (4)	3 (2)
* Effort & preparation	11 (10)	4 (8)	15 (9)
* Pupils/students (knowledge of, concern for, love for and enjoy)	26 (23)	5 (9)	31 (19)
* Rapport with children, interaction with them	6 (5.5)	4 (7.5)	10 (6)
* Content/work/ subject matter (knowledge of and love for)	9 (8)	4 (7.5)	13 (8)
* Plan activities/ AVA/participation	4 (4)	3 (6)	7 (4)
* Make lessons lively, interesting, fun, enjoyable	12 (10.5)	6 (11)	18 (11)
* Incentives/praise, reward, feedback	6 (5.5)	5 (9)	11 (6.5)
* Set goal/purpose/ expectation/clear instruction	5 (4.5)	2 (4)	7 (4)
* Teaching methods/ resources and ideas	7 (6)	2 (4)	9 (5.5)

Note: Responses > number of participants due to multiple responses from each.

Stover (1994), teachersembrace peers coaching as a collegial activity because itexcludes evaluation from the professional growth process, provides camaraderie to teachers from an "equal," reduces the isolation of teaching, builds communities of teacher-learners, and encourages a new sense of professionalism.

Hence, teachers should learn togethe formally or informally, struggle as a group officially or unofficially and grow as a body professionally to overcome diversity in the school. The ways in which teachers work together take many forms (Paine & Ma, 1993). If we are keen to learn, struggle and grow together, we will strive to cooperate and collaborate.

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